

LESSON 6: USING FEEDBACK IN THE CLASSROOM



*acceptability
clarify
comprehensive
constructive
conviction
criteria
feedback
flexibility
jargon
modify
objectivity
preconceived
rapport
reinforce*

INTRODUCTION

We are all familiar with courses that consist of readings, lectures, assigned writings, and tests. In traditional courses like these, individualized comments from instructors to their students are often limited to grades on papers, quizzes, exams, and the final grade. However, comments of this sort come well after instructors have evaluated learners on their course work. If there is any impact on learning, it will come during the next phase, in another course, or in some follow-up activity.

Such after-the-fact comments often contribute little to learning because they come too late for learners to take corrective action. On the other hand, the most important task you have as an instructor may be to provide information that learners can use to improve themselves during the course. Such information guides learners while they still can take corrective action.

This lesson examines how you can give **objective**, **acceptable**, **constructive**, **flexible**, and **comprehensive** feedback. The information in this lesson may seem overwhelming to you at first, but so are the responsibilities of a teacher. The techniques in this lesson will help you to know how to give effective feedback. Then, the more you use those techniques, the more familiar and easier they will become, and the more your communication skills and overall performance will improve.

DEFINITIONS AND APPLICATIONS

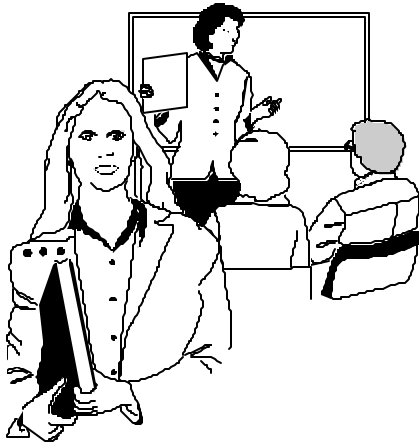
In general, feedback is any information about the results of a process. When we use a computer, for instance, we feed in the information and get back feedback. In the social sciences, feedback is the information that returns to the source of the process so as to **reinforce** or **modify** it. For example, if a coach finds that the football team is weak in defense tactics, the coach schedules the team for more tackling practice. In psychological **jargon**, feedback is called the “knowledge of results.”

In the classroom, feedback can be defined as information that learners receive from their instructor about their performance, information that may cause them to take self-corrective action and guide them in attaining the goals of the course more effectively.

Learners can receive feedback from at least five sources: themselves, the learning task, fellow cadets/students, the instructor, and from the school/cadet battalion.

Feedback is generally given for *informational and/or motivational* purposes. Informational feedback corrects errors that the learner commits. Motivational feedback motivates the learner to try harder. Informational feedback should always be motivating, but

motivational feedback does not always provide information. A pat on the back or a word of encouragement may motivate a learner, but will not necessarily point out any errors in the learner's performance.



It is important to realize that feedback need not always be negative or destructive. In fact, positive feedback is almost always seen as warmer and more sincere than negative feedback given in identical ways.

GIVING FEEDBACK TO LEARNERS

The purpose of giving feedback in the classroom is to improve learner performance. In its most effective form, it provides constructive advice, direction, and guidance to learners in their effort to raise their performance levels. Learners must understand the purpose and role of feedback in the learning process. Otherwise, they may reject it and make little or no effort to improve.

Feedback can also be used as a device to reinforce learning. Although all feedback cannot be used in this manner, the instructor should take every opportunity to use feedback as a means of **clarifying**, emphasizing, or reinforcing instruction.

CHARACTERISTICS (OR CONDITIONS) OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Effective feedback stresses both learner strengths as well as suggestions for improvement. Therefore, the most significant characteristics, or conditions, of effective feedback are objectivity, acceptability, constructiveness, flexibility, and comprehensiveness. Each of these characteristics is briefly explained below.

OBJECTIVITY

Effective feedback focuses on the learner and the learner's performance; it should not reflect the instructor's personal opinions, likes, and biases. For example, if the learner makes a speech and expresses views that conflict with your beliefs, you should give feedback on the merits of the speech, not on the basis of the agreement or disagreement with the learner's views. To be objective, feedback must be honest; it must be based on factual performance — not performance as it could have been or as you and the learner wish it had been.

ACCEPTABILITY

Learners usually accept feedback when you give it with **conviction** and sincerity. Usually, you have the opportunity to establish **rapport** and mutual respect with learners before the need for giving feedback arises. If there is no such opportunity, your manner, attitude, and knowledge of the subject must serve instead.

CONSTRUCTIVENESS

You must be straightforward and honest; you must also respect the learner's personal feelings. Feedback, then, is pointless unless a learner profits from it. However,

praise just for the sake of praise has no value unless the only goal is to motivate or improve self-concept.

Effective feedback reflects your consideration of the learner's need for self-esteem, recognition, confidence, and the approval of others. Ridicule, anger, or fun at the expense of the learner, have no place in constructive feedback.

FLEXIBILITY

You should always remain flexible in giving feedback by avoiding mechanical, predetermined techniques and **preconceived** opinions regarding content, subject matter, and learner capability. Instead, you should consider:

- The actual content of a learner's effort.
- What actually happens during an activity?
- The observed factors that affect performance.

COMPREHENSIVENESS

Comprehensive feedback need not be extremely long nor must it treat every detail of a learner's performance. As an instructor, you must decide whether you can achieve the best results by discussing a few major points or a number of minor points. You should base your feedback either on what areas need improvement or on what areas you can reasonably expect a learner to improve.

Feedback includes both strengths and weaknesses. Only you can determine a proper balance between the two. It is a disservice to learners to dwell on the excellence of their performance and neglect areas that need improving (or vice versa).



GROUND RULES AND TIPS FOR GIVING FEEDBACK

GROUND RULES

- Establish and maintain rapport with learners.
- Cover the major strengths and weaknesses. Try to be specific; give examples if possible.
- Avoid trying to discuss everything. A few well — made points may be more beneficial than numerous, but inadequately developed points.
- Try to avoid comments with “never” or “always”; most rules have exceptions. Your feedback may be incorrect or inappropriate for certain situations.
- Do not criticize something that cannot be corrected.
- Do not criticize when you cannot suggest an improvement.
- Avoid being maneuvered into the unpleasant position of defending feedback. If the feedback is honest, objective, constructive, and supported, no defense should be necessary.
- If part of the feedback is written, it should be consistent with the oral feedback.

TIPS

- Reinforce correct performance by letting learners know what they are doing well. Your encouragement and support will mean a great deal to your learners.
- Make sure to base your feedback on the evaluation **criteria**.
 - ⇒ When you see someone doing something differently than you would ordinarily do it, consider whether it matters. Ask yourself questions such as:
 1. Will it work the way he/she, they are doing it?
 2. Is this a better way?
 3. Will it cause problems for them later?
 4. Is it safe?
 - ⇒ Allow for individual variations. Consider the learner's openness to suggestions before recommending changes that are not based on the criteria.
- Identify incorrect performance as early as possible. Give feedback as soon as you see the incorrect performance.
- Try to provide feedback in the most constructive way possible. Help learners understand how to do a task correctly — do not just tell them what they are doing wrong.

- Be aware of the learners' sensitivity to correction, especially in front of other people (generally avoided whenever possible). Keep your voice down when providing individual feedback. Avoid the temptation to point out one person's mistake to the whole group as an example.
- Give feedback less often as learners progress.

CONCLUSION

As a potential instructor, coach, and counselor in JROTC, you must be able to give effective, positive **feedback**. By improving the way that you give feedback, you are improving the future performances of your teammates and classmates.

